

Conference Abstract

Broadening Participation in an Increasingly Digitized World

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Abstract

Participation within digitized collections has shown boom, but diversity of participants has remained static. Traditionally, natural history collections were only utilized by researchers with access to the physical collections. With the advent of open source digitized specimens, whether through transcription of the original label onto an electronic database, sound bites, two-dimensional photographs, or three-dimensional volume files, natural history collections are now at nearly everyone's fingertips. Although collections have been historically clustered in the northern hemisphere, preliminary data suggest that researchers from the southern hemisphere have started using collections more via online portals. Studies have shown that a more heterogeneous community leads to an increase in the quality of science and publications. iDigBio (Integrated Digitized Biocollections), the United States' national resource for Advancing Digitization of Biodiversity Collections (ADBC), is a National Science Foundation (NSF) funded initiative that makes millions of biological specimens, in the form of data and images, available electronically to the wider world. Our network of institutions across the world provide the digitized content that makes up our search portal.

Minority serving institutions (MSIs) are an important resource for under served communities in the United States. They provide the educational and social skills required to overcome discrimination and economic disparities that these communities often face. Here, we focus on the types of institutions involved in uploading data, specifically those that identify as MSIs and the role they play in the field. After assessing MSI participation with

the ADBC program by comparing databases of participants, I found that out of the nearly 400 individual institutions that contribute to the database, one-third of them identify as an MSI. The next step is further engaging contributing MSIs and identifying MSIs with natural history collections that are not a part of the iDigBio network and inviting them to join. By incorporating them into our network, we hope to reach underserved populations of students while broadening the scope of collections available.

Including MSIs into our greater community of partners is not enough. We are striving to provide a greater understanding of how the iDigBio portal is used by new communities in the US with limited resources. In this way, we can provide educators with the tools necessary to better prepare their students for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) careers, as well as improving the collections available to the world.

Keywords

iDigBio, Diversity, Digitization, Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs)

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